DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 695 CG 012 312

AUTHOR Fortin, Joseph A.; Sesi, Maher S.
TITLE Interpersonal Attraction and Dependence as a Function of Self-Esteem.
PUB DATE 7 May 77
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (Chicago, Illinois, May 5-7, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attachment Behavior; *Dating (Social); *Females; Interpersonal Competence; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Personality; Personality Studies; Research Projects; *Self Esteem; Social Psychology; Social Relations
IDENTIFIERS *Attractiveness; *Dependency Behavior

ABSTRACT

This experiment tested the hypotheses that interpersonal dependence would be an inverse function of the individual's chronic and situational levels of self-esteem, and that interpersonal attraction would be an inverse function of the individual's induced/situational level of self-esteem, but would be unaffected by her chronic level. Subjects were 48 females in exclusive dating relationships for a minimum of six months prior to the experiment. They were administered the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) as a measure of their chronic level of self-esteem. They were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: high self-esteem, low self-esteem, and the control. When the subjects returned two weeks later for the second phase, each was given a bogus personality evaluation designed to raise or lower her self-esteem. Each member of the control group was told her evaluation was not yet completed. The subjects were then approached by the second experimenter who administered the Love Scale (Rubin, 1970) as a measure of interpersonal dependence. All subjects were then completely debriefed. The results significantly supported the first hypothesis. But the second hypothesis was only partially supported, as interpersonal attraction was not found to be significantly affected by the induced/situational level of self-esteem. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED151695

Interpersonal Attraction and Dependence as a Function of Self-Esteem

Joseph A. Fortin

Maher S. Sesi

Wayne State University

Presented at the Forty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association

May 7, 1977

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. S. Sesi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG012312

Abstract

This experiment tested the following hypotheses: (a) that interpersonal dependence would be an inverse function of the individual's chronic and situational levels of self-esteem; and (b) that interpersonal attraction would be an inverse function of the individual's induced/situational level of self-esteem, but would be unaffected by her chronic level. Forty-eight (48) female subjects in exclusive dating relationships for a minimum of six months prior to the experiment were administered the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) as a measure of their chronic level of self-esteem. They were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: high self-esteem, low self-esteem, and the control. When the subjects returned two weeks later for the second phase, each was given a bogus personality evaluation designed to raise or lower her self-esteem. Each member of the control group was told her evaluation was not yet completed. The subjects were then approached by the second experimenter who administered the Love Scale (Rubin, 1970) as a measure of interpersonal dependence. All subjects were then completely debriefed. The results significantly supported the first hypothesis. But the second hypothesis was only partially supported, as interpersonal attraction was not found to be significantly affected by the induced/situational level of self-esteem.

Interpersonal Attraction and Dependence as a Function of Self-Esteem

This experiment tested the effects of self-esteem on interpersonal attraction and dependence. There were two interrelated hypotheses: (a) that interpersonal dependence would be an inverse function of both the situational/induced and the chronic level of self-esteem; and (b) that interpersonal attraction would be an inverse function of the situational level of self-esteem, but would be unaffected by the chronic level of self-esteem.

The first hypothesis made was that within an exclusive dating relationship, interpersonal dependence, and its overt manifestation, jealousy, would be an inverse function of both the chronic and the induced levels of self-esteem. This hypothesis was derived in part from the theory of intrapersonal homeostatic mechanisms by Foa and Foa (1974). According to this theory, man may be perceived as a complex system of regulatory mechanisms which function to maintain a constant "optimal range of social resources", such as love and status. This range represents the individual's needs. The degree to which an individual develops a dependency upon a particularistic source of social resources or reinforcements will therefore depend in part upon the degree to which his needs are fulfilled by that source, as well as by the availability of

alternate sources. Thus, as the reinforcement within an exclusive dating relationship is normatively particularistic, the degree of the individual's dependence upon his dating partner should vary inversely with his perception of his potential for securing alternate sources of reinforcement. The individual with low self-esteem will therefore, view his potential as low while concommitantly experiencing a greater need for social resources than will an individual with high self-esteem. This low self-perception, in turn, manifests itself as a drive to maintain the present source of reinforcement. And it is this drive to maintain the integrity and stability of the present relationship which constitutes jealousy.

The second hypothesis concerned the effects of self-esteem on interpersonal attraction or love. Prior research in the area has shown that the lower the individual's self-esteem, the more motivated he is towards an accepting other (Walster, 1965; Jacobs, et. al., 1971). But this research has only dealt with the effects of situationally induced self-esteem on the interaction between two previously unacquainted individuals, and thus bears no relation to enduring interpersonal relationships per se. This criticism is further enhanced by a large body of both theory and research which demonstrates that interpersonal attraction is the result of a multiplicity of variables, such as demographic characteristics and attitudes

which all interact at a high level of complexity. Thus while interpersonal attraction may appear to be inversely related to self-esteem in that low self-esteem individuals do rate an accepting other more favorably than do high self-esteem individuals, it may in fact also be due to the self-esteem manipulation. This manipulation would theoretically create a disequilibrium or state of need in the individual which would, in the case of the low self-esteem individual, result in the greater saliency of, and attraction to, an accepting other. Thus the individual, motivated to restore equilibrium and stability to his self-esteem circuitously rates himself more positively by rating an accepting other more positively. Individuals with high self-esteem do not manifest as great a need and therefore do not rate an accepting other as highly. But since this occurs primarily as the result of the situationally induced disequilibrium, then this effect should not occur when attraction is analyzed as a function of the chronic level of self-esteem. Thus the experimenters hypothesized that interpersonal attraction would be an inverse function of the situationally induced level of self-esteem reflecting the effect of these postulated homeostatic mechanisms, and that the degree of attraction would be unaffected by the chronic self-esteem of the individual.

To test these hypotheses, the aid of forty-eight (48) female subjects at Wayne State University was enlisted.

These subjects had all been involved in an exclusive dating relationship for a minimum of six (6) months prior to the experiment. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years with the mode being 19.

The experiment itself consisted of two (2) separate phases, spaced two weeks apart. During the first phase, all subjects were given the Rorschach Inkblot test, the six scales of the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) dealing with poise, ascendency, and self-assurance, and an inventory of relevant demographic characteristics. The subjects were then informed that the experiment was designed to measure the correlation between personality and demographic characteristics, as related to a successful dating relationship. They were also told to return in two weeks to receive the results of the experiment and their own personality profiles which would be interpreted by a professional psychologist. All the subjects were then randomly assigned to one of three treatment conditions: the high self-esteem condition, the low self-esteem condition, or the control group.

The second phase of the experiment consisted of the situational induction of differential levels of self-esteem, regardless of each subject's chronic level of self-esteem. To accomplish this, the subjects in the high self-esteem group were given a standard personality evaluation consisting of such phrases as "your capabilities are particularly demon-

strated in a strong personality, leadership abilities and evidence of unusual empathy and sensitivity," and "an open and imaginative mind usually enables you to present yourself as you really are and eliminates the necessity of playing a socially desirable role." This is in distinct contrast to the personality evaluation received by the subjects in the low self-esteem group which consisted of such phrases as "due to her lack of maturity and her inexperience with those her own age in social interaction, she presents an image which is incompatible with her actual self," and "her use of stereotypes is unimaginative and she readily adopts a conventional acceptable stereotype." Subjects in the control group were told their personality evaluations were not yet completed.

After the desired situational level of self-esteem had been induced, the subjects were then approached by the second experimenter who asked them to help him in a short fifteen minute study on romantic love. All subjects were then given the nine item abridged version of the Rubin Love Scale (Rubin, 1970) as a measure of interpersonal attraction or love. Intermingled with the love scale was a jealousy scale which was constructed by the experimenters as a measure of interpersonal dependence. After the subjects had completed this composite love-jealousy scale, they were completely debriefed and informed of this experiment's goals.

To construct the jealousy scale, fifteen questions were generated. These questions were structurally similar to those of the Love Scale, such that when they were intermixed with it, the composite scale was physically consistent. The resulting love-jealousy scale was then pre-tested on a target population of twenty-five (25) individuals, all of whom were in an exclusive relationship at the time of the pre-test. This group of subjects was composed of two contrasting types: those who exhibited a large degree of jealousy, and those who were relatively free of jealousy. Although a factor-analysis was not performed on these items, an examination of the data revealed that seven of the fifteen items showed a high degree of discrepancy which was correlated with whether the individual was known to be jealous or not. The resulting seven items were then intermixed with the nine item abridged Love Scale to form the composite Love-Jealousy Scale.

To analyze the data, the subjects within each treatment condition were assigned to either the high or low chronic self-esteem group. To derive each subject's chronic level of self-esteem, a median split was performed within each of the experimental conditions, based on the raw CPI scores. This resulted in a 2x3 matrix for each of the two dependent variables, interpersonal attraction, and interpersonal dependence.

Insert Graph #1 About Here

A two-way analysis of variance was then performed, which indicated, as can be seen in this graph, that interpersonal dependence was significantly affected by both the chronic ($F=15.3$, $df=1/42$, $p=0.001$), and the induced/situational ($F=16.43$, $df=2/42$, $p=0.001$) levels of self-esteem.

Insert Graph #2 About Here

A two-way analysis of variance was also done to determine the effects of the chronic and induced levels of self-esteeem on interpersonal attraction. As can be seen in this graph, interpersonal attraction, or love, was significantly unaffected by the chronic level of self-esteem ($F=0.531$, $df=1/42$, $p=0.99$) as was hypothesized, but that it was only slightly affected by the induced/situational level of self-esteem ($F=1.259$, $df=2/42$, $p=0.29$).

A correlation cefficient was also computed which showed that the two dependent variables, interpersonal attraction and interpersonal dependence, were significantly correlated ($r-0.49$, $p=0.001$).

These results thus support the first hypothesis that interpersonal dependence or jealousy is an inverse or negative function of the chronic and the induced levels of self-esteem. That is, the higher the self-esteem of the individual, the less dependent that individual will be on another as a primary source of social resources. This is in accordance with the notion that an individual develops a state of de-

pendence on a particularistic source, and that the degree of this dependence will vary as a function of the degree of the individual's self-acceptance, or conversely, with that individual's perception of the degree of his or her acceptability to others.

But these results do not in any way negate other factors which combine and interact to form the jealous response, since this behavior is often conditioned through modeling and other forms of learning that begin in early childhood. The norms of society also are such that the individual is inhibited from forming close emotional bonds outside the primary family group. This then also helps foster an unnecessary amount of dependence on the individual's partner. The degree to which these other factors contribute should thus be researched in order to provide a balanced perspective on the jealous response.

This has important clinical implications in that it is readily apparent that any successful program organized to deal with morbid jealousy must first restructure the client's cognitions about himself and his value. Unless the client's self-esteem is raised, the probablility is high that the problems which arose concommitant with the development of a neurotic dependence will not dissipate.

The results also supported in part the second hypothesis, as interpersonal attraction or love was not affected by differtial levels of chronic self-esteem. But as was already

noted, the experimenters failed to replicate the earlier findings of a negative relationship between self-esteem and interpersonal attraction. One reason for this might be that in the previous studies, the subjects all rated their attraction towards a previously unknown other. Furthermore, the individual which they rated unconditionally accepted them, and had no previous history of negative feedback. These conditions would seldom if ever be duplicated in an enduring interpersonal relationship and thus the attraction which the subjects felt towards their dating partners would be mitigated by these other factors. But this too is only a supposition, and as such, must be tested expirically for support.

References

Foa, U. and Foa, E. Societal Structures of the Mind. Springfield, Illinois: Thomas Books, 1974.

Jacobs, L., Berscheid, E., and Walster, E. Self-Esteem and Attraction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1971, 17, 84-91.

Rubin, Z. Measurement of Romantic Love. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1970, 4(3), 461-468.

Walster, E. The effect of self-esteem on romantic liking. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1965, 1, 184-197.

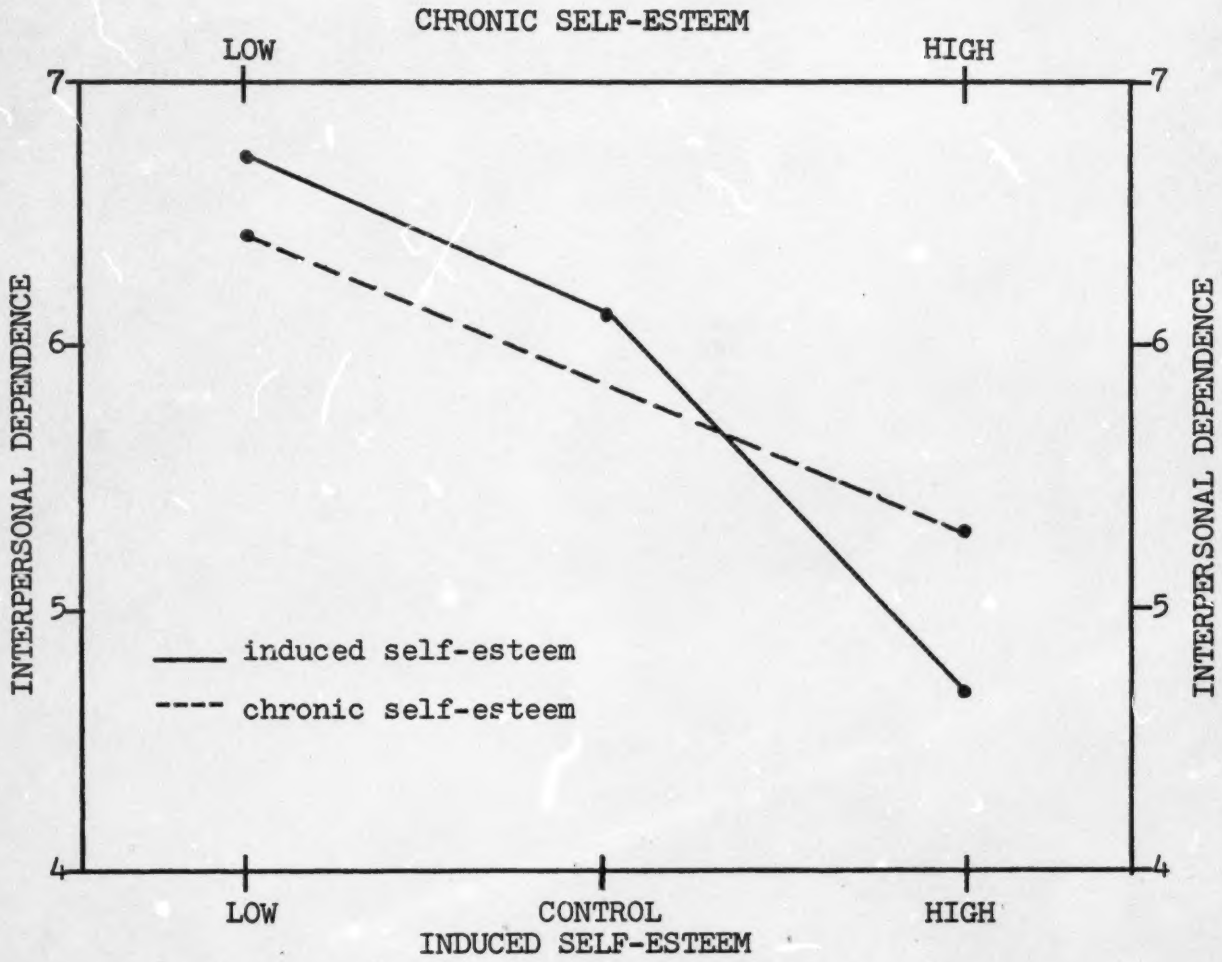
CHRONIC SELF-ESTEEM
LOW
HIGH
7
6
5
4
INTERPERSONAL DEPENDENCE
INTERPERSONAL DEPENDENCE
induced self-esteem
chronic self-esteem
LOW
CONTROL
HIGH
INDUCED SELF-ESTEEM

Figure I

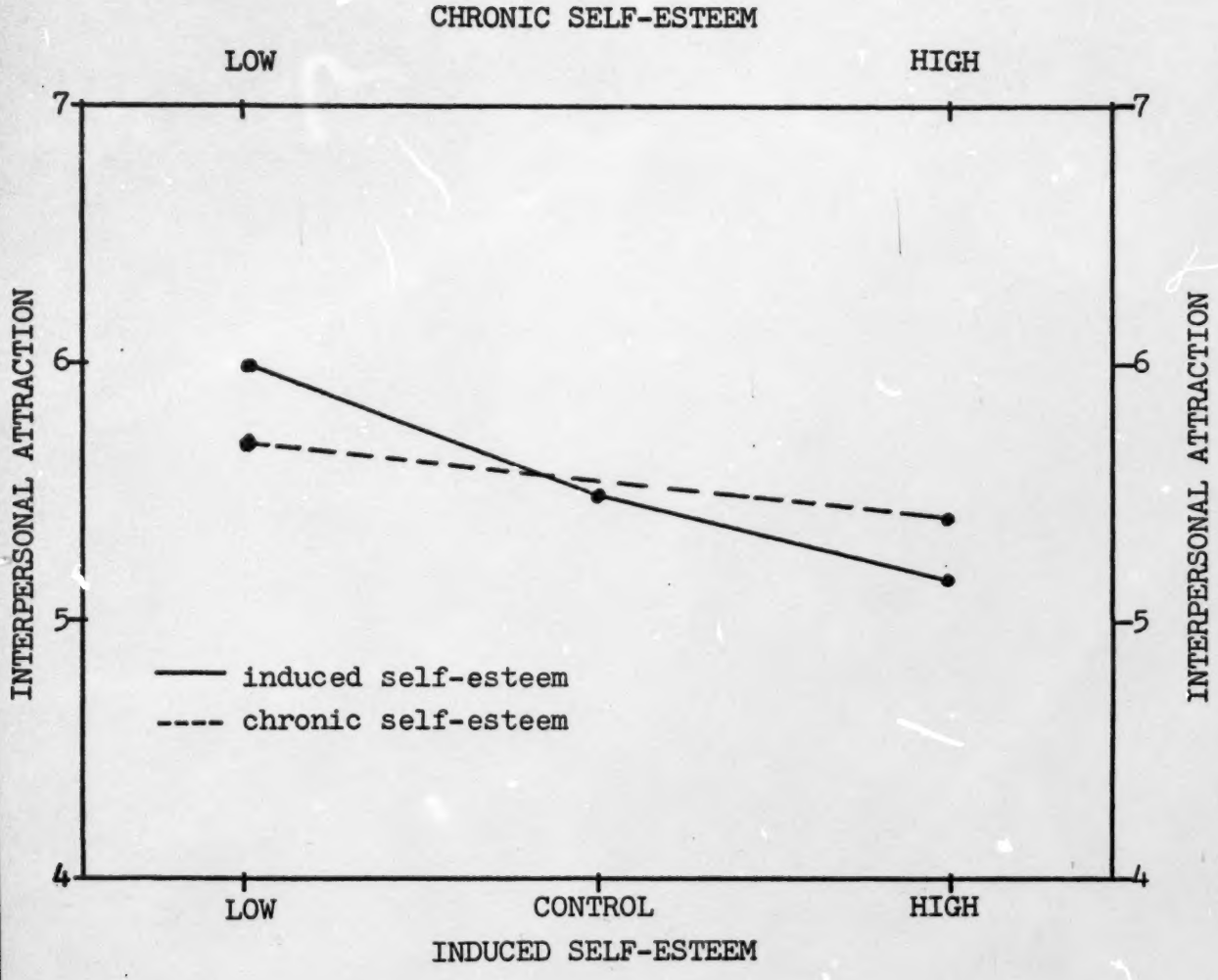
CHRONIC SELF-ESTEEM
LOW
HIGH
7
6
5
4
INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION
INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION
induced self-esteem
chronic self-esteem
LOW
CONTROL
HIGH
INDUCED SELF-ESTEEM

Figure 2